

The Infected Blood Inquiry weekly summary

The
Haemophilia
Society

A summary of inquiry hearings: week of 16 May 2022

David Mellor criticised 'shoddy' legal advice he received as health minister in 1989 that the Department of Health (DoH) did not have a duty of care towards those infected with HIV through contaminated blood products. He said this was a 'Pontius Pilate defence' and felt 'proper compensation' should be paid. As health minister Mr Mellor said the most stressful part of his job was

talking to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher about AIDS. He was critical of the attitude of 'moral indignation' from the PM and other colleagues and felt politicians shouldn't 'preach' but offer practical information. Mr Mellor never thought the initial £10m given to the Macfarlane Trust (MFT) in 1988 would be enough, he said. DoH officials told the MFT informally,

not to hold back on distributing grants as more money would come, but this was not officially recorded. When he moved to the Treasury in 1990 he and the health secretary pushed to resolve the HIV litigation case, at a cost of £50m. The DoH feared that 'losing badly' might mean no appeal was possible and felt the public was on the side of people with haemophilia.

Inquiry focus: notifying people at risk of vCJD

Professor of Clinical Neuropathy, James Ironside told the inquiry about his work at the National CJD Research and Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh. There have been 178 cases of vCJD in the UK, including one person with a bleeding disorder who was found to have vCJD in his spleen. No one has been infected through contaminated surgical instruments.

Prof Ironside was a member of the CJD Incidents Panel, which was set up in 2000 to advise government and health bodies about how to respond to CJD and vCJD. After 'lengthy debate', the panel agreed that a letter should be sent to people who'd received blood from donors who'd developed vCJD, telling them they were at risk. The first letter was sent in 2003. The following year an 'umbrella letter' went to all recipients of UK plasma-based products between 1980 and 2001 warning them they were at risk of developing vCJD. In 2013 this advice was changed with people treated between 1980-1989 'denotified' of being at risk.

Quotes of the week

'It felt...more appropriate....to inform everyone than to inform some and not others because perhaps it was felt that others who were not informed would still want to know what the risk was anyway.'

Prof Ironside, on why an 'umbrella' statement was sent out in 2004 to all people at risk of vCJD through plasma products

'What I wanted to do was deal straightaway with this problem and offer proper compensation and...hope that the misery that we had inflicted, without intending to, on these folk at least could be alleviated to some degree.'

David Mellor

'There has been virtually no public sympathy for the government's position on this case.'

Confidential Treasury memo to Mr Mellor, November 1990, on HIV litigation

'...we should not pass by a possible opportunity to settle this very difficult issue.'

Letter to PM John Major from Health Secretary William Waldegrave asking for approval for an out of court settlement with haemophiliacs infected with HIV. December 1990